

MESSAGE FROM CUBA ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE IMPRISONMENT OF THE PRISONERS OF THE CUBAN SPRING

Friends from around the world:

I'm speaking to you from Cuba, on behalf of those that do not have a voice because they are in prisons, confined like criminals, even though they have not committed any crime. They are in cages, without space, even though they have fought for the freedom of all; hated, even though they preach forgiveness and reconciliation; humiliated and scorned, even though they have defended the dignity and rights of all; threatened with death even though they are defenders of life; abused by violence, even though they are peaceful and work for peace; accused of being enemies of the state, even though no one has defended sovereignty and independence like they have, deprived of light, but from there, from the darkness of their cells, they are proclaiming the Cuban Spring, which is the hope for all people.

By incarcerating these people that fight for human rights and free speech, the totalitarian authority tried to repress the truth, but what they did was create a beam of light, that shooting forth from the depths, from the camps of terror, now illuminates many hearts in Cuba, and in all the world. They suffer, and their families and friends suffer with them, but they have not given up, and we will not give up. You that respond with solidarity are multiplying this light, to announce that the Cuban Spring has begun.

For many years, we Cubans were victims of a false image that many around the world believed was our reality, and certainly, we have suffered through many long years in desolation, and endured a repressive regime, while the propaganda spoke of the island of freedom.

For years, many Cubans worked with love and good will seeking to create a more just and egalitarian society. Today they know that they were deceived and feel frustrated because an exclusionary order has been put in place, one in which a powerful group has privileges and a life of riches while the majority is subjected to poverty. Many Cubans have had to go into exile, and suffer because they are far from their families and their Homeland to which they cannot return, even though they have not stopped loving it.

This exclusion and lack of rights has only been able to be sustained through mechanisms of repression and lies, which through the years has established a culture of fear, copying and synthesizing the modes of repression tactics of the totalitarian regimes, to which entire peoples in Europe, Latin America and other parts of the world have been subjected.

In Cuba there have always been men and women who, with only their faith, demanded freedom and suffered imprisonment, exile, discrimination and martyrdom.

In our country, in the last few years, a peaceful civic movement has been created, one with a profound sense of humanity, that gathers all the suffering and the experiences of our people, and instead of translating them into new confrontations, promotes reconciliation and freedom from hate and fear. An expression of this civic movement is the campaign for the Varela Project, in which thousands of citizens, even under repression, sign and give their identity number demanding a Referendum so that the laws recognize and respect the fundamental rights of citizens and that those changes to the laws that Cuba needs, start to occur now.

It was to repress the Varela Project, free press and all the ways of defending the rights of Cubans that these 75 prisoners were locked up, even though about 300 more had already been incarcerated. In this manner, they did not only commit a great crime and do great harm, but they also tried to close the doors to a future of freedom and peace for Cuba. We want to knock down these barriers, without hate and without violence and we are determined to do so because this

civic movement against hate and against fear has allowed hope to be reborn. This is the Spring of Cuba.

In the midst of this repression, the campaign for the Referendum on the Varela Project continues, as do the other voices that defend the truth and dignity of Cubans, with many initiatives.

We thank all of those who have gone out to the streets or those who have assembled peacefully to demand the liberation of the Prisoners of the Cuban Spring. We call on all of those that can hear this message - children, youth, the elderly of all towns, to all those that love freedom and peace - to show their solidarity with the Cuban people, which means to support the Referendum so that the voices of Cubans are heard, which also means to demand freedom for all political prisoners, which also means to support peaceful change in Cuba. In this way, you are supporting world peace and freedom for all human beings.

A strong embrace from all Cubans that love freedom. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

Oswaldo J. Payá Sardiñas

In the name of the Christian Liberation Movement

And the Citizens Organizing Committee of the Varela Project

Havana, March 18, 2004